

**Fort Caswell Papers,
PC.1840**

1909-1912; 1917-1919

Finding aid prepared by Fran Tracy-Walls

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

State Archives of North Carolina
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Summary Information

Repository State Archives of North Carolina

Title Fort Caswell Papers

Date [bulk] Bulk, 1917-1918

Date [inclusive] 1909-1912; 1917-1919

Extent 1.0 boxes

Language English

Abstract Fort Caswell, located on Oak Island, Brunswick County, was occupied by various branches of the U.S. armed forces for much of the period, 1836-1945. The U.S. Army built a full military reservation on the site between the 1890s and early 1900s. By 1916 the fort had been rebuilt and was considered an important east coast military post during World War I. It was sold in 1923, but reacquired and put into service until the end of World War II.

These are the working files relating to construction and maintenance of the cantonment and post. The collection consists of the Quartermaster files for construction, 1917-1919; and a few papers from the District Artillery Engineer's files, 1909-1912.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item] in PC.1840, Fort Caswell Papers, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C., U.S.A.

Historical Note

Construction of Fort Caswell was authorized in 1825; and the site was named in 1833 for the state's first governor elected by the General Assembly, Richard Caswell. It was located on Oak Island, Brunswick County, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, and bounded on the South by the Atlantic Ocean and on the north by the Elizabeth River.

Until the Civil War era the fort was occupied only by U.S. Army caretakers, and was not fully armed. Between 1861 and 1865, however, Fort Caswell changed hands several times. For the Confederacy, the fort served as one of the main defenses of the Cape Fear River. Though never directly attacked, the fort's heavy guns from time to time fired on Union warships along the coast as they blockaded the river's mouth.

Around 1885 Fort Caswell was reviewed by the Secretary of War's Fortification's Board and selected to receive modern defenses. Subsequently, the fort's original masonry structure was significantly altered between 1894 and 1904. By around 1916 the fort was in the process of being rebuilt, and was considered an important East Coast military post. It was the headquarters of the Cape Fear Coastal Defenses and was manned by three companies of Coast Artillery Corps under the command of Col. Charles A. Bennett. The armament consisted of mortars, direct and rapid-fire guns, and a mine defense. During the United States involvement in World War I, the fort was used as an Army training camp.

After World War I, the world was thought to be at peace for good and in 1923 the War Department closed the reservation. It was listed for sale as surplus property and purchased by Florida developers. With the U.S. entry into World War II in 1941, the U.S. Navy subsequently purchased the reservation.

During World War II, Fort Caswell served as an army base and submarine lookout post. Once more the fort served to help protect the North Carolina coast and the port of Wilmington during military crises. Following the war in 1946 the fort was designated as war surplus and sold in 1949 to the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Scope and Contents note

These papers from the working files at Fort Caswell (Oak Island, Brunswick County), relating to construction and maintenance of the cantonment and post. They contain 372 documents from the Quartermaster's files for construction at Fort Caswell, 1917-1919, and ten documents from the District Artillery Engineer's files, 1909-1912. Many of them relate to the power plant at the fort, including the generator, the switchboard for detonating marine mines, the powerhouse, and so forth. Others relate to the purchase of cross ties, lumber, window frames, door frames, maple flooring, bricks, terra cotta pipes, stoves, showers, lavatories, sink wastes, fire fighting equipment, construction of coal bins, and

an ice-making machine. A number of them includes papers of the traveling accountant sent by the War Department to close out Fort Caswell's construction accounts following the armistice, and they reflect shipment of some materiel (specifically crossties) to Camp Eustis, Va. Probably these files represent only a portion of the original files. Some of file folders in this collection were empty, but the blank folders titles have been retained.

Collection Arrangement

Collection follows the original order of the papers as received. That order was based on a numerical filing system.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

State Archives of North Carolina September 2012

Access Restrictions

Available for research

Legal Status note

Transfer.

Copyright Notice

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Acquisitions Information

Benjamin E. Reynolds, Wilmington, NC, 22 November 1995 (Agent: Fort Fisher Historic Site)

Processing Information note

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Related Materials

Related Collections

Additional information on topics found in this collection may be found in the Manuscript and Archives Reference System (MARS) <http://mars.archives.ncdcr.gov/BasicSearch.aspx>. See in particular North Carolina Division of Archives and Records map collection and photographs and negatives.

Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Brunswick County (N.C.)
- Oak Island (Brunswick County, N.C.)

Subject(s)

- Fortification--North Carolina
- Forts--North Carolina

Sources:

Monica Celinski. "The History of Fort Caswell." www.southporttimes.com/featured/200494.html Paul Branch. "Fort Caswell." Encyclopedia of North Carolina. William S. Powell, editor. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.pp.458-459.